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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ANKARA 002204

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TAGS: PREL PGOV PINS MARR TU

SUBJECT: TURKISH CHOD OZKOK GIVES DELPHIC MESSAGE ON CYPRUS, WARNS GOT ON CORE TENETS OF ATATURK LEGACY

(U) Classified by Ambassador Eric Edelman; reasons: 1.4
(b,d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Most Turkish commentators interpreted CHOD Ozkok's careful April 13 remarks on Cyprus as a signal the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) will not oppose Turkish Cypriot or Turkish parliamentary acceptance of the draft Cyprus settlement. A number of observers, however, taking into account President Sezer's similar comments on Cyprus April 14, think Ozkok is banking on a Greek Cypriot "no" to render the point moot or leaving the possibility open for TSK to manipulate the Turkish parliament to vote against. These observers, looking at Ozkok's briefing as a whole, see the press briefing as a strong warning to PM Erdogan and his AKP government not to cross TSK red lines regarding core principles of the Republic. Some AKP M.P.s and opposition politicians tell us they see the briefing as a signal the TSK has given up on trying to work with Erdogan. End summary.

¶2. (C) It is rare for CHOD Ozkok to brief the press, and his April 13 briefing was thus keenly followed. He used the occasion to tread a careful line on the draft Cyprus settlement. He also laid down strong markers on other subjects: preservation of the Republic's core Ataturk principles, the role of the TSK, and rejection of insinuations that he has adopted a reasonable approach in return for a promise from the AKP government of high public office.

CYPRUS

¶3. (C) Most commentators, e.g., Mehmet Ali Birand on CNN-Turk immediately following the briefing, interpreted Ozkok's measured words on Cyprus, refusal to say yes or no, and firmly stated belief that the Turkish Cypriots and Turkish parliament will take "the most correct decision" as a signal that the TSK could live with approval of the settlement. In support of this interpretation some also pointed to Ozkok's answer when Sedat Ergin, a senior establishmentarian commentator for mass-circulation "Hurriyet", asked for an elaboration of the settlement's positive aspects in addition to the negative aspects Ozkok zeroed in on in his prepared remarks. The general assumption is that Ergin's question was planted. Listing several positive elements of the settlement, Ozkok answered that no one should be worried by the negative factors, which are "surmountable", with the TSK doing "everything possible to this end."

¶4. (C) However, other observers noted Ozkok's repeated signals of deep disagreement over Cyprus with PM Erdogan and the AKP government. Among several signals, Ozkok underscored that the approach adopted deviated from what the NSC had agreed to at its Jan. 23, 2004 meeting (an assessment reiterated by President Sezer in an April 14 speech). Ozkok mentioned neither Erdogan nor the government by name during his remarks. Contacts note that omitting mention of a name is a well-established TSK way of showing contempt.

¶5. (C) TSK has an obligation even beyond that of the Republic of Turkey ("the obligation given to the Republic of Turkey and to the TSK...") to guarantee the security of the Turkish Cypriots and Cyprus has a strategic role in Turkey's security, Ozkok emphasized. The TSK believes "in its heart" that its responsibilities continue in these two regards. For the first time concerning a question of national security, "two different views have crystallized." The TSK has laid out its views "in every legal and constitutional forum", i.e., in weekly meetings with Erdogan and President Sezer and in bi-monthly NSC meetings, in an "open...and objective" way (the sub-text being that no one can claim the TSK wasn't clear in its objections). The most important of several deficiencies in the settlement is the lack of EU commitment that the settlement derogations from EU practice will be considered primary law, a sine qua non for TSK acceptance, Ozkok emphasized. "The final decision rests with the Turkish parliament" (while many commentators call this comment a

reaffirmation of Ozkok's support for democracy, leading national security analyst Faruk Demir and "Aksam" Ankara bureau chief Nuray Basaran see the remark as a clear signal Ozkok is going over Erdogan's head and serving notice to the parliament that it will have to weigh its ratification vote carefully if the Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots approve the settlement).

DEFENSE OF CORE PRINCIPLES OF THE REPUBLIC

¶16. (U) In extensively criticizing attempts to change the nature of the State or to force TSK to adopt a more prominent role in politics, and in rebuffing "unjust" attacks on TSK, Ozkok directed his warnings to all points of the compass: the GOT (again, without referring to Erdogan or the government by name), the movement of controversial Islamist thinker Fethullah Gulen, ultra-Kemalists, and right-wing racists.

¶17. (C) Ozkok asserted that history teaches that only a strong state (i.e., a strong centralized state apparatus) can survive in Anatolia. Within that state, powerful armed forces are linked also to a strong economy. The Republic has a "deeply-rooted, deeply experienced" state structure; if, in fact, it is true that the structure needs changes, such changes should be carried out taking account of the State's experience and based on consensus with affected institutions and all sectors of society. Numerous contacts agree this statement was a stern warning against AKP's pressing for reform of public administration, for decentralization of government, or for changing the constitution in ways affecting the powers of, among others, the TSK.

¶18. (U) In quoting Ataturk's phrase that the army is parliament's, and in underlining that the army has constitutional and legal obligations, Ozkok again reiterated for many audiences (his hardliners, AKP) TSK's role as defender and arbiter of Ataturk's legacy of a "secular" republic. He put everyone on notice that there are consequences to actions. In this regard, Basaran noted that AKP M.P. Mahmut Kocak had called her immediately after the briefing to ask "eagerly" whether Ozkok was signaling TSK's intention to move, albeit indirectly, against Erdogan and the AKP government.

¶19. (C) According to some oft-expressed domestic and foreign views, Ozkok continued, TSK's defense of the Ataturk national concept and secularism is the greatest barrier to Turkey's development and the only solution is to remove TSK's influence and weaken it. "Who," he asked, "benefits from destroying such a powerful institution?" In part, "murky Internet sites" which "knowingly or unknowingly" (meaning "knowingly", as our Turkish contacts immediately noted) serve these views.

¶10. (U) Campaigns against the religious beliefs of members of TSK or others (a reference to discrimination against

SIPDIS
heterodox Muslim Alevis or unreligious people on the part of Sunnis) are absolutely unacceptable, Ozkok declared. TSK will not shut its eyes to efforts to divert the nation from its attachment to Ataturk nationalism, "which is not based on ethnic identity" (a rejection of the Turkish racism of right-wing nationalists, including retired CHOD Huseyin Kivrikoglu and his followers who are still in the General Staff).

¶11. (U) It is wrong and dangerous to try to drag TSK into politics, Ozkok admonished in a warning which all our contacts understand as aimed at ultra-Kemalists, who insist that TSK pronounce a deterrent view on every subject.

¶12. (C) Ozkok reproached those who "knowingly or unknowingly" misinterpret his "responsible, moderate, constructive, unifying, and careful" approach : "I command a generation of soldiers who give priority to rationality rather than the luxuriant sound of their own voice" (seen by all our contacts as a slam at retired generals such as Kemal Yavuz, who has adopted a hard anti-Ozkok, anti-NATO, pro-Eurasianist line; former NSC secretary general Tuncer Kilinc, who espouses identical views; Kivrikoglu; and those approaching retirement such as Land Forces Commander Aytac Yalman who have tried to undermine Ozkok). Ozkok bluntly rejected insinuations (which Yavuz has spread in his newspaper column) that he has adopted a moderate approach in return for a GOT promise to get him appointed to high office.

COMMENT

¶13. (C) So far, most of the media have interpreted Ozkok as saying that TSK will not stand in the way of TC and Turkish parliamentary approval of the Cyprus settlement. Most commentators initially chose to see nothing new in the remainder of Ozkok's remarks. However, at least a few AKP M.P.s such as Mahmut Kocak and Mehmet Cicek indicate to us they are now uncertain and sense that maneuvering against Erdogan and AKP will accelerate. Husamettin Ozkan, deputy PM under Ecevit and a man with ties to Ozkok and renewed national ambitions, told us the same.

¶14. (C) For all his seeming soft-spokenness, Ozkok underscored that he is in command of TSK. He emphasized as well that TSK will fully protect what it continues broadly to define as its constitutional and legal obligations, although the manner in which TSK expresses itself publicly may be more "post-post-modern" than in the past.
EDELMAN